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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9101  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0733  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1780  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0791

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000363

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [KPAO](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA WATCHDOG NOTES IMPROVED ELECTION COVERAGE

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SUMMARY  
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1. (SBU) From April 16 to May 15, the Yerevan Press Club (YPC) monitored TV coverage of the mayoral election campaign, and found that Armenia's leading seven TV stations were more objective and neutral than they were in the run-up to the 2008 presidential election. In spite of the more neutral coverage, YPC noted that the overall amount of air time allotted to the opposition Armenian National Congress (ANC) was considerably less than its five major opponents. The ANC issued a statement on May 13 condemning Armenian Public TV (one of the seven channels monitored) for not reporting on its campaign events. Since then, post has noted more frequent appearances by ANC officials, including two programs on Public TV.  
END SUMMARY.

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WHAT YPC MONITORED  
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2. (U) YPC carried out two stages of monitoring, the first from April 16 - May 1 that focused on TV coverage prior to the launch of election campaigns on May 2, and the second from May 2 - 15 that focused on coverage of the election campaigning. The research was aimed at monitoring the TV companies adherence to the Law on Public TV and Radio Broadcasting, the level of public interest in the elections, the relevance of information presented to the public by the media, and accessibility of TV broadcasting for the candidates. The monitoring concentrated on the evening prime time programs of seven major TV channels (Public TV - H1, ALM TV, Armenian Second TV - H2, Armnews, Yerkir Media TV, Kentron TV, and Shant TV). YPC recorded references to any program that mentioned the names of the political parties, party leaders or any other candidate involved in the mayoral elections. Air time devoted to the election campaign was also reported.

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RESULTS OF MONITORING  
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3. (U) In the first stage, the marginal People's Party received the majority of air time, determined in seconds, YPC with over 44,000 seconds (approximately 12.3 hours). (Comment: The eccentric head of the party, who is also its mayoral candidate, owns ALM TV, and he appears nightly on his own TV station, giving hour-long monologues to an unseen interviewer. End Comment.) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutiun (ARF) came in second with 33,331 seconds (9.25 hours); the ruling Republican Party third with 12,289 seconds (3.4 hours); Prosperous Armenia fourth with 12,043 seconds (3.34 hours); Orinats Yerkir fifth with 5,232 seconds (1.45 hours); the opposition ANC sixth with 4,492 seconds (1.25 hours);

and the other marginal party in the election, the Armenian Socialist Labor Party, in seventh with 127 seconds (2 minutes).

14. (U) YPC assessed coverage in the first stage to be on balance widely accessible for all parties, and spread among the seven stations "relatively evenly." The report made special mention, however, of the coverage given by ALM TV to the People's Party candidate, noting that the candidate owns the station. YPC likewise noted other party affiliations of the TV companies, stating that Armnews Director Menua Harutiunian is a member of the Republican Party, Kentron TV favored Prosperous Armenia in its coverage, and Yerkir Media, which is owned by an ARF member, focused on the Dashnaks' activities more than others.

15. (U) Of media reports on the candidates, 94.6 percent were non-editorial. The parties most mentioned on TV were the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Republican Party of Armenia, and the Prosperous Armenia party. The Republican Party specifically received 22 positive references (all of them concerning the party's mayoral candidate and current mayor, Gagik Beglarian). All of these positive references appeared on Armnews. Prosperous Armenia received 19 positive references, all of which appeared on Kentron TV.

16. (U) In the second stage of its monitoring, YPC found air time to be divided between the mayoral candidates as follows: People's Party first with 15.9 hours; Prosperous Armenia second with 9 hours; ARF third with 7.23 hours; Orinats Yerkir fourth with 5.9 hours; the Republican Party fifth with 4.9 hours; the ANC sixth with 2.6 hours; and the Socialist Labor Party seventh with 1.14 hours.

17. (U) YPC assessed 97 percent of the references that were made to candidates during this stage to be as neutral. The Republican Party received 11 positive references and 1 negative (5 of the 11 positive references appeared on Armnews). The People's Party received 10

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positive and 0 negative references (all of the positive references appeared on ALM TV), and Prosperous Armenia received 9 positive and 0 negative references (5 of the 9 appeared on Kentron TV). All negative references to candidates and parties were opinions expressed by participants of TV programs, and not by journalists.

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ANC CRIES FOUL, AND YPC BACKS UP ONE CHARGE  
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18. (SBU) On May 13, the Armenian National Congress (ANC) issued a statement condemning Armenian Public TV for providing unequal and unbalanced coverage during the election campaign, saying that it threatened the legitimacy of the elections. (Note: Public TV is the number one news source for approximately 70 percent of the viewing audience in Armenia. End Note.) The ANC alleged that while Public TV ignored the ANC's campaign activities, it was providing "wide coverage" of the campaign activities of other parties contesting the election.

19. (SBU) In releasing their results on May 22, YPC backed up ANC claims that it was receiving less air time than other parties. According to YPC, ANC during the monitored period received considerably less coverage than all other serious election contenders. Interestingly, Post observed an uptick in TV appearances by ANC leaders after May 15, with two of their leaders appearing for 30 minute interviews on Kentron TV, and their number two candidate in the mayoral election appearing on Public TV for a 20-minute interview aired live during prime time on the evening of May 22. (Comment: The leader of the ANC, ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian, has refused at least several requests to appear on television during the campaign. LTP's aides have attributed this to LTP's belief that he will not get a fair hearing. Our take is that LTP weakens his claim of a double standard on media coverage if he himself refuses to take advantage of the opportunities presented to him. End Comment.)

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USERS OF PAID AIR TIME

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¶10. (U) Prosperous Armenia registered the highest level of usage of paid TV time (about 4 hours) provided by TV companies for the election. Paid time provided by Yerkir Media was wholly used by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. All 7 parties took advantage of the free daily political advertisement possibilities on Public TV (H1).

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (SBU) Unbalanced, unequal media coverage in Armenian elections is a perennial issue. The norm is for the ruling party and its partners to dominate air time and good press, relying on Public TV or pro-government, private TV companies to carry their water. YPC's results on the current media coverage, therefore, come as a glimmer of hope in a campaign that has had little to boast about so far. The numbers indicate that the ANC has a valid point when it complains that it receives less coverage than its opponents. Compared with the 2008 presidential campaign, however, there has been significant improvement. The blatant smear campaign run by pro-governmental stations against LTP and his supporters during the presidential campaign has not been in evidence this time around. ANC heavyweights have been given opportunities to make their case in prime time television, and - with the notable exception of LTP himself -- they have done so. Media coverage of the campaign has been far from perfect, but has certainly exceeded the (admittedly low) bar set in previous Armenian elections.

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